



<http://finance.senate.gov>
Press_Office@finance-rep.senate.gov

For Immediate Release
Wednesday, June 25, 2008

Grassley calls on Congress and NIH leaders to identify conflicts of interest
in taxpayer sponsored medical research

WASHINGTON — Senator Chuck Grassley is asking members of Congress who hold leadership positions on the appropriations committee to join his effort to hold the National Institutes of Health accountable for monitoring conflicts of interest in government sponsored medical research.

“There’s mounting evidence that the NIH hasn’t done due diligence in keeping track of industry payments to medical researchers,” Grassley said. “With the objectivity and integrity of research at stake, along with public trust in the system, there are plenty of reasons for Congress to step in to establish penalties for grantees who fail to report financial conflicts and to bring transparency to taxpayer funded medical research.”

Current federal law requires the NIH to monitor financial conflicts of interest by requiring the institutions who receive grants to collect and manage information on the money that their researchers receive from drug and device makers and others in industry. Recent reports have revealed that this tracking is not happening in individual cases. In addition, the Inspector General for the Department of Health and Human Services reported in January that the NIH does not adequately monitor its extramural grants for conflicts of interest. Extramural research is research supported funds from the NIH for researchers and organizations outside the NIH through a grant, contract or cooperative agreement.

Grassley said that NIH leaders need to send a clear message that hiding conflicts of interest due to either sloppiness or sneakiness will not be tolerated. “The monetary value and prestige of NIH grants is significant enough that the possibility of losing a grant for not complying with reporting requirements ought to be a strong incentive to follow the rules,” he said. With almost \$24 billion in NIH research grants awarded this year, Grassley said that he hopes lawmakers with primary responsibility for directing those funds will also step in and make the rules meaningful and shed light on what’s happening.

Yesterday, the Senate Labor-HHS Appropriations Subcommittee approved a \$154 billion spending bill for fiscal year 2009 for education and medical research. The largest increase, \$1

billion, would go to the National Institutes of Health.

Grassley has sponsored bipartisan legislation with Senator Herb Kohl that would require pharmaceutical drug and medical device makers to publicly report payments of over \$500 to any physician. He said the current laws governing NIH grants would bring greater transparency, as well, if they are enforced. The Director of the NIH pledged to “significantly enhance the identification and management of FOCIs (financial conflicts of interest)” in a June 20, 2008 letter to Grassley. The Director also said that NIH is considering gathering public comments to modify the regulations that govern NIH extramural grants.

The letter from NIH Director Elias Zerhouni, M.D. is posted with this news release at <http://finance.senate.gov>

Two stories from the New York Times regarding conflicts of interest in medical research sponsored by the NIH are also posted at this location.

The text of letters sent today from Grassley to the chairmen and ranking members of the Senate and House appropriations subcommittee for NIH funding are also posted with this news release at <http://finance.senate.gov>.